

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



Testimony of

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before the District Council Committee on Human Services

Oversight Hearing

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Good morning, Chairwoman Allen and members of the District Council Committee on Human Services. I am Olivia Golden, director of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency. I'm grateful for your commitment over many years to vulnerable children and fragile families, for your dedication to healthy neighborhoods and communities, and for your willingness to invest in change over the long haul. Today, I will present solid evidence that your many years of hard work—along with the hard work and dedication of the Mayor, your colleagues on the Council as a whole, and CFSA and its partners—are paying off in sustained, steady construction of a local safety net for children and in real improvement in children's lives. While many significant challenges still lie ahead, the whole District community can be proud of what we are doing together to transform a history of persistent failure into a pathway toward success. U.S. District Court acceptance of the final Implementation Plan in the *LaShawn* lawsuit presents an opportunity to end court oversight early in 2007, just three years from now. For the first time, I come before you not just with hope but also with a genuine belief that if we increase our political will and performance over the next 18 months, we can reach our dual goals of establishing a strong child protective system and ending court oversight.

In terms of CFSA performance, I have a number of substantive topics to cover with you today.

- First, I'll discuss the findings of three reports the Court Monitor delivered to the U.S. District Court on February 11. These reports, the first to assess the District's performance against the rigorous benchmarks in the Court's Final Implementation Plan, found that:

"On balance, the record of accomplishments in the past six months is considerable and reflects an organization that is committed to positive change and has the leadership and skills to carry it out This is not to say that there are not serious issues remaining to be identified and resolved . . . but there is a growing ability, both within the child welfare agency and with the other stakeholders in the system, to move forward collectively, not solely in response to crisis, but in a more strategic and planful way." (p.25).

- Second, I'll describe the major leap forward CFSA has taken in our ability to assess our own performance and how these internal evaluations are adding value to examination and input from outside experts.
- Third, I want to share valuable, new information about the circumstances of District children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system.
- Fourth, I want to highlight CFSA's immediate agenda for change and reform. Based on what we know from outside review and internal research and quality assurance and on the

constantly accelerating requirements of the Federal Court's Implementation Plan, the pace of change cannot slacken and must even accelerate.

- Finally, I will look ahead to next steps—particularly to the enormous strides the District must make in fiscal year 2005 to meet the timetable of the Final Implementation Plan. The plan expects District efforts to build a strong safety net for children and families and end court oversight of child welfare to succeed by early 2007. Thus, by the end of fiscal year 2005, the District will have just 15 months to accomplish any remaining performance and service improvements.

Court Monitor's Reports

On February 11, the Court Monitor delivered three reports to U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan. They included:

- A 100-page benchmark report about CFSA performance against final Implementation Plan outcomes and strategies with deadlines of July 31, and September 30, 2003;
- A 23-page assessment of CFSA's hotline for reporting child abuse and neglect in the District; and
- A 178-page analysis of the quality of CFSA and private-provider practices in managing a diverse group of selected child welfare cases.

These reports represent an important milestone for CFSA and the District in three ways.

- First, these are the Court Monitor’s first reports to Judge Hogan since he approved the final Implementation Plan in the *LaShawn* lawsuit last May. They show that compared to the rigorous performance benchmarks in the final Implementation Plan, CFSA is making substantial progress. Thus, the District now has momentum and credibility as we take the next, even more rigorous steps toward completing the Implementation Plan and achieving the court’s Modified Final Order.
- Second, these reports illustrate the intense scrutiny CFSA continuously receives from independent experts. Methods used include not only review of paper records and administrative data from our FACES computer system but also direct observation of CFSA workers and interviews with clients and other stakeholders on child welfare cases. All three reports are available to the public.
- Third, these reports show that the District’s commitment to and investment in a strong safety net is paying off for abused and neglected children and troubled families. They illustrate that the hard work of everyone involved is making a difference in the lives of children, based on both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Findings of these reports speak directly to CFSA’s performance over the past year while reiterating a major theme of all my testimonies before you to date. That is: CFSA is making steady, incremental progress in reforming child welfare, and we have a long series of significant challenges still ahead. Investigations need to be more prompt, services need to be better coordinated, service gaps need to be filled, the quality of our social work practice needs to improve now that caseloads are more reasonable, and both CFSA and its partners (such as the

Family Court) need a much greater sense of urgency about achieving permanence for every child. Some details about findings of these reports will give you a good overview of CFSA achievements and areas in need of further improvement.

Benchmark Report

In regard to CFSA's performance against final Implementation benchmarks for July and September 2003, the Court Monitor found that out of 15 outcome measures, CFSA achieved 13. Of 35 implementation strategies, CFSA completed 24 and is making progress on the remaining 11. Among numerous achievements, five stand out as direct improvements to the safety and well being of abused and neglected children.

- **Individual Caseloads:** For the first time in the history of the court's oversight, CFSA has reduced the average caseload of social workers with case management responsibilities to less than 20. At the end of December, CFSA's average caseload per worker was 17, and no worker had more than 29 cases. Now that they are no longer overwhelmed, our workers can focus on providing the quality of service to children and families that the final Implementation Plan demands. As one of our eight-year veteran social workers said recently:

My top caseload was 45, not the highest in the agency but too high to keep up. I spent all my time bouncing from one emergency to another and going to court. Now, I have 25 cases, and I'm really getting to know these children and families. Sometimes, I can even spot a crisis brewing and step in before it becomes a major emergency.

- **Case Plans:** Case plans are the roadmap for keeping children safe and for ensuring stability and permanence for them as promptly as possible. Against a goal to have a plan for 60 percent of foster-care cases, CFSA achieved 61 percent. This is a 144 percent improvement over our baseline performance of 25 percent three years ago. Although the Court Monitor has not yet verified it, CFSA internal tracking showed that at the end of December, 70 percent of foster-care cases had case plans.
- **Visits:** Foster children need regular visits from social workers to ensure their progress and well being. When the Court Monitor completed her baseline report on the agency's performance at its return from Receivership to District control in May 2001, just seven percent of children received a monthly visit. By June 30, 2003, just two years later, the Implementation Plan goal for monthly visits to children in foster care was seven times that level, or 50 percent. We didn't know if we could achieve that incredible rate of change, but we knew it was critical to children to do everything we could, and we are proud that the report shows that CFSA achieved the goal, with monthly visits for 54 percent of children in July 2003.
- **Licensing:** CFSA has fully implemented licensing of group homes and independent living programs serving foster children and youth. In her benchmark report, the Court Monitor wrote: *This was a large undertaking and is a significant and long overdue accomplishment.* (p. 15)
- **Young Children in Congregate Care:** The District has a long history of over-reliance on group care for children and youth. But experts now agree that healthy emotional

development, especially for young children, depends on the bonding experiences that only family-like settings can provide. CFSA continues to move away from reliance on group care for young children. Against a goal of no more than 65 children under age 12 in congregate care, CFSA had only 47. That's a 50 percent decline from October 2002, when we had 95. At the end of last month, CFSA had 26 children under age 12 in congregate care.

In addition, the Court Monitor found that FACES, CFSA's automated information system, has improved dramatically in quality and timeliness. For this report, the Court Monitor conducted independent paper reviews to reach her conclusions. But now that she has confirmed FACES' accuracy in most areas, she plans to reduce the scope of paper case reviews considerably in the future.

Out of a total of 50 benchmarks for July and September 2003, CFSA improved—or is in the process of improving—against 49. Our one performance decline was in the area of timely completion of investigations. In response to this decline, which CFSA identified as a major concern last summer, we:

- Launched a major recruitment effort for an Intake/Investigations manager and to fill vacancies for Investigations staff;
- Developed new investigations policies, which the Court Monitor has approved;
- Conducted training on these policies for all Investigations supervisors and workers; and
- Developed a new safety and risk assessment tool that investigators will be using by April.

Intake & Investigations is the critical gateway to child protective services. We are not going to allow any tradeoff between quality and timeliness of investigations but rather are aiming to conduct comprehensive investigations within the prescribed time frame.

Hotline Report

This naturally brings me to the Court Monitor's findings about our 24-hour hotline for reporting child abuse and neglect in the District, (202) 671-SAFE. During the summer of 2003, the Court Monitor observed hotline staff during several shifts, conducted interviews and focus groups, and analyzed administrative data. The goal was to provide an objective assessment and to recommend steps for ongoing improvement. The review showed that:

- From August 2002 through July 2003, CFSA's hotline received an average of 612 calls a month, with a high of 764 and a low of 491.
- An average of 32 percent of investigations were substantiated for child abuse or neglect, consistent with national experience.

Among several hotline functions that are working well, the Court Monitor noted:

- A new overlap between workers on the morning and evening shifts to share information and ensure continuity.
- Positive camaraderie and teamwork among hotline workers and the Metropolitan Police Department.
- Professionalism, courtesy, and empathy of workers in taking calls from both mandated reporters and the public.

- Automated checks for prior case history for all calls entered into FACES.

At the same time, among several recommendations, the Court Monitor suggested:

- Filling staff vacancies, which CFSA has almost completed at this point, and reviewing staffing levels once existing vacancies are filled to determine if the new levels are sufficient.
- Ensuring workers understand Intake & Investigations policies. CFSA completed training of all supervisors and workers two weeks ago on new policies the Court Monitor approved last fall. Based on what we learned from this training about areas that need additional attention, reinforcement, or policy development, we plan follow-up in staff and supervisory meetings.
- Entering all calls for information and referral into the computer to trigger the automatic check for prior case history, improving automated support for the Hotline, and ensuring a phone system that allows taping and supervisory review of all calls. CFSA is currently improving selected computer screens used by hotline workers, and a request for proposals for telephone technology that will allow supervisory review and taping of calls has recently closed.

Without a doubt, this report shows that CFSA has made progress—and still has a long way to go.

Quality Service Review (QSR) Report

That is also the overall conclusion of the first round of Quality Service Reviews ever held at CFSA. This state-of-the-art approach to evaluating child welfare is used to: understand what is and is not working well for children and families and why, identify system patterns of strong and weak practice, and track system problems and progress.

The Court Monitor, other national experts, and CFSA volunteers selected 40 diverse cases from CFSA and provider agencies that have case management responsibilities. Interviews with children, birth parents, foster parents, social workers, legal representatives, and other professionals involved in each case resulted in 38 “illustrative case stories.” Collectively, these stories indicate the quality of practices in improving safety, permanence, and well being for abused and neglected children and troubled families. They offer extraordinarily rich information that goes beyond CFSA to look at the District-wide system for abused and neglected children. We have already consulted the report extensively as we plan our future agenda internally and with partners such as the Family Court, contracted service providers, and other District agencies. This report is public information since it does not identify any of the individuals involved by name.

While the primary purpose of the review was to establish a baseline for future measurement of CFSA practice and service quality, some members of the review team had been in the District before and noted several significant improvements compared to what they had seen on their previous visit: *A . . . general observation of reviewers . . . was that child welfare practice in the District of Columbia is significantly improving in many observable ways* (p.9).

For example, the report highlights that every case (except one) had an assigned social worker who was knowledgeable about the case and that this was “a significant improvement from past practice.” Other key strengths cited in the report are:

- the safety and stability of current placements;
- the quality and commitment of foster parents;
- evidence of recruitment of new foster parents, including within the District;
- evidence of efforts to license foster parents, including kinship parents;
- guardianship with relatives as a new approach to permanence for children;
- a more extensive service array than in the past (including substance abuse services for a mother with her children, through the new Family Drug Treatment Court); and
- efforts to make sure families, including siblings, stay in contact.

At the same time, the report notes several areas for improvement, which are generally consistent with areas CFSA had already identified for our reform next steps. Key areas for improvement include:

- Improvements in the quality of practice—particularly in social worker ability to engage families, bring together the team of service providers and informal supports who care about a child and family, and act with a sense of urgency to achieve permanence for every child. The need for these improvements is to be expected as our local child protective system evolves from overwhelmed and broken to a strong, high-quality safety net. Now that individual caseloads are dropping to manageable levels, workers can get out of the crisis mode and plan for each child’s long-term well being. These types of

internal cultural changes have become possible as a direct result of your support for adequate staff levels at CFSA and are high on our current list of priorities.

- More clarity among CFSA, Family Court, and others in planning for adoption. When a child cannot go home safely, the report notes that it is best for the child and the parents to have clarity about when the child's goal changes to adoption. However, the District has a long history of uncertainty for an extended period of time or movement back and forth between adoption and reunification. With the District's investments in legal support for CFSA through co-located OCC attorneys, and with the Family Court reform, focus has increased on key legal steps involved in adoption, such as timely filing for Termination of Parental Rights. But there is still a great deal more to do.
- Filling service gaps in the areas of health and mental health services and affordable housing.

The report also notes the complexity and intensity of the challenges in all the cases reviewed.

Too often, the challenges include substance abuse by one or both parents, large families, and long-term and sometimes multi-generational involvement with the child welfare system.

According to the report: *[T]he first important conclusion from the review was an appreciation of the difficulty and complexity of the issues presented by children and families served by CFSA. . . . Reviewers continually noted the difficulty of the cases.* (p. 9).

CFSA Quality Assurance Plan

While outside, independent assessments like those I have just summarized are enormously valuable, any agency pursuing continuous quality improvement must also strengthen its own internal ability to assess practices, build on strengths, and act promptly to correct weaknesses. In that regard, CFSA took a monumental leap forward in December in becoming a self-assessing and continuously improving organization by developing a comprehensive Quality Assurance Plan. In the past, the District's child welfare program suffered from a lack of timely, accurate management information. Today, CFSA routinely relies on management information to support internal planning, daily activities, performance monitoring, and decision making. The Quality Assurance Plan goes further by synchronizing and elevating CFSA quality assurance initiatives that address case practice. Among several key functions, the plan calls for adding regular qualitative reviews to our routine collection of quantitative information. The next qualitative review, to include outside partners, the Court Monitor, and CFSA staff, is tentatively scheduled for late this spring.

Our primary vehicle for documenting and communicating progress toward institutionalizing best practices in child welfare is a semi-annual *Quality Assurance Report* that we will prepare each June and December. This document will be available to the public.

New Information About Children and Families

In the past several weeks, CFSA has pulled together important information about our children and families which we hope can guide future community planning and service delivery. First, CFSA has completed a Needs Assessment designed to help us understand what birth families

need to keep children safe, prevent placement, and support successful reunification and what foster families need to support stable placements. It is the first of a series the Implementation Plan requires every two years to guide CFSA and other District agencies in making resources available to families. A Resource Development Plan based on what we learned from the Needs Assessment is due annually on March 31, starting this year.

Through interviews and surveys of birth parents caring for children at home, social workers, foster parents, judges, and community workers in the Collaboratives, we gained a much fuller sense of the daunting challenges our birth parents face. We found that the typical birth parent is 31 years old and has four children under age 18. The largest family in our sample included ten children under age 18. We also learned that 96 percent of our birth parents are unmarried, 73 percent do not work outside the home, more than half do not have a high school diploma or GED, and fully 25 percent were homeless or living in a shelter before becoming involved with CFSA. Survey respondents told us that mental health services (particularly for maternal depression), substance abuse services, parenting support, economic support (such as subsidized housing and child care), and reducing social isolation were key to keeping families together or reuniting them.

When we looked at supports to prevent disruption in children's placements, foster parents highlighted mental health services to address children's behavior as well as regular and continuing support from social workers. Social workers, judges, and other observers also highlighted additional training to help foster parents manage children's behaviors and understand children's continuing attachment to their birth parents, recruitment of a broader range of foster parents, and better matching of foster parents with foster children. We have provided the full

report to the Committee and are sharing it broadly with our partners in other District agencies and the community.

Another important source of information about child and family needs is CFSA's new 18-page Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment Plan. To prepare it, CFSA's Recruitment Unit tapped data from FACES and other internal sources and also used recruitment strategies recommended by an outside expert under a grant to the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments from the Freddie Mac Foundation. Never before has so much solid information about CFSA foster/adoptive recruitment needs and challenges been collected in a single document.

Among many significant insights are the following.

- As of September 30, 2003, CFSA had 2,409 children living in foster homes. Twenty-seven percent were kinship placements, 31 percent were CFSA foster homes, and 42 percent were network foster homes recruited and licensed by partner agencies under contract to CFSA.
- Currently, most CFSA foster parents are mature, unmarried adults. Approximately 70 percent are single, and 85 percent are age 40 or older.
- Of foster children with a goal of reunification with their birth families, 79 percent come from Wards 5, 6, 7, or 8.

- Based on the needs of current CFSA foster children and youth, CFSA should target somewhat younger adults and families in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8. We need to recruit parents willing to foster boys of all ages, teen moms and their babies, sibling groups, and children with substantial medical needs. We also need foster parents willing to take children into their homes on short notice, especially at night and on weekends.

Based on the knowledge that 10 percent of prospects who enter the CFSA foster-care licensing process actually become licensed (consistent with national experience) and that we lose about 50 foster homes each year, CFSA must recruit 1,000 prospects to achieve a net gain of 50 licensed foster homes.

Next Steps: The Action Agenda for Reform

As I have indicated in each of the Committee's Oversight Hearings to date, while the District has accomplished a great deal, we cannot slow down and in fact must accelerate the pace of change from here. With all the detailed information I have shared today, we are now better able to define the path ahead than ever before. We have an aggressive series of next steps planned for the next several months.

- **CFSA will award new contracts for group care and family-based care that respond to higher performance standards and better information about child and family needs.**

For some time, this Committee has requested procurement reform to hold CFSA service contractors to clear performance standards and to make payment rates consistent with a strong competitive process. Now, award of congregate-care contracts under the new

reform process is imminent, by the end of March. The family-care RFP has also closed, with award expected by the end of May. These new contracts will require higher standards for services to children and families, consistent with our goals of safety, permanence, and well being and with what we have learned about child and family needs. They also include clearer performance expectations, emphasize links to District neighborhoods and community-based services, and require providers to connect children to Medicaid-funded mental health services through a core service agency.

- **CFSA will work to improve the quality of practice, both in investigations and ongoing case management.** Our own assessment, consistent with the Court Monitor's reviews, is that we are now at the point where we can and must translate reduced caseloads into more consistent, high quality responses to children and families. Based on our own experience in the District as well as national findings, we must focus on consistency in: ensuring accurate and comprehensive assessments of family needs and strengths that take into account all available information, understanding patterns that might indicate underlying issues such as substance abuse or domestic violence, creating and sustaining a sense of urgency about permanence, consistently engaging families in planning, and strengthening our links to the communities where families live. As the Quality Service Review illustrates, our best work is quality work, but we are far from providing top quality all of the time to all the 3,000 children we serve. Therefore, in addition to bringing down caseloads, our plans for the coming months include: in-service training for supervisors, social workers, and social work aides; implementation of a major practice improvement called Facilitated Family Team Meetings; implementation of a more comprehensive

approach to safety assessment; and implementation of stronger policies to govern case planning, placement, visitation, and adoption services.

- **CFSA will step up recruitment of foster and adoptive families.** We are moving rapidly to implement our new foster and adoptive parent recruitment plan. In the coming months, we will add a second unit of staff to focus on recruitment of foster and adoptive parents. We will also mount a campaign to tap arts and sports organizations to identifying adults already committed to the District's young people and conduct permanency staffings to identify potential adoptive resources for waiting youth , based on a model that has been effective elsewhere in the country.
- **CFSA will use new FY04 Federal funding to intensify the pace of change.** The FY04 appropriations bill just enacted by Congress and the President includes \$14 million awarded to CFSA, DMH, and the Council of Governments to support improvements in foster care in the District. These resources will allow us to jump-start plans for reform in several key areas, including moving forward on integrating system with DMH. We have shared with the Committee the Mayor's detailed spending plan for these resources, and I will briefly note several highlights here.

First, the appropriation includes \$3.9 million for DMH to provide timely, high quality mental health services to foster children. Given the extent of the need for mental health services, these resources will be extremely valuable in speeding up the District's response. They will be used to: co-locate two DMH people with CFSA to facilitate prompt response; expand psychologist and psychiatrist contracts with DMH's assessment

center; build provider capacity for important services, such as mobile response and community response teams; provide specialized services for foster children; and improve links and quality assurance so clients get to the right services more quickly. The plan focuses on building capacity among mental health providers who are Medicaid-certified now, in the pipeline for certification, or have a good prospect for certification, so that service delivery will be sustainable over time through Federal Medicaid funding. CFSA and DMH have committed to managing this project jointly, with a project manager already identified and a cross-agency team moving ahead.

Other components of the Federal appropriation are:

- \$2 million to support early intervention programs to provide intensive, immediate services to foster children. These resources will help to support immediate implementation of Facilitated Family Team Meetings and will also ensure immediate services when children first enter care.
- \$1 million to establish an emergency support fund to allow children to remain in the care of an approved or licensed family member. These resources will assist kin caregivers who would not be able to step forward without this help.
- \$3 million to provide loan repayment for social workers. The goal of this appropriation is to support recruitment and retention of social workers in the very difficult work of public child welfare. As in loan repayment programs that exist across the country for teachers and health care workers, the underlying idea is that

the professionals who do the nation's most difficult work often face daunting incentives to take higher-paying jobs as a result of their student loan burden.

- \$3 million to upgrade CFSA's automated system, FACES, to web-based technology and to provide computer technology for social workers. This appropriation will allow FACES to take advantage of the best current technology and offer better access to off-site users, including private agencies. This next step also supports the Mayor's Safe Passages initiative, because it supports co-location of staff at multiple sites.

- \$1 million to the Council of Governments in conjunction with the D.C. Action for Children for respite care for foster parents as well as recruitment of foster parents.

Completing the Reform Agenda

After all we have been through together in the process of reforming child welfare in the District, you may find it hard to believe—as I do—that only 34 months remain to meet all the goals of the final Implementation Plan, establish the strong safety net District children and families deserve, and end court oversight of child welfare in the District. Last October, I testified that building that safety net and ending court oversight will not be easy because the *LaShawn* final Implementation Plan significantly raises the bar for performance of the District's child welfare system.

Benchmark deadlines occur every three to six months, and the plan demands brisk quantitative and qualitative progress against standards.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the Implementation Plan requirements for fiscal year 2005. After doubling and tripling performance in the brief period since the end of the Receivership, the District must now accelerate that pace to continue to ascend on the ladder of improvement the Implementation Plan represents. In fact, District and CFSA performance against the demanding standards in FY05 may well determine whether we are prepared to move beyond court oversight by December 31, 2006.

I want to provide just a few examples of the performance leaps the final Implementation Plan dictates in FY05.

- **Individual Caseloads:** At the end of the fourth quarter of FY03, the Implementation Plan mandated no more than 23 cases per Ongoing social worker. CFSA achieved substantial compliance with that goal. But by the end of the first quarter of FY05, the Implementation Plan requires that Ongoing social workers will have no more than 20 cases of foster children without special needs, or no more than 17 in-home cases, or no more than 12 cases of foster children with special needs.
- **Visits:** With lower caseloads, Implementation Plan expectations for consistent high performance increase rapidly. The requirement for monthly visits by social workers to children in foster care was 50 percent by the end of the fourth quarter of FY03. CFSA achieved 54 percent. But by the end of the third quarter of FY05, that requirement jumps to 90 percent of children in foster care receiving monthly visits and 40 percent receiving visits twice a month. In addition to sufficient staffing, this will require work with the

Family Court on scheduling as well as attention to supports, such as cars and computer support for entering information in the field.

- **Services To Families and Children:** The Implementation Plan lays out a series of requirements for families to be linked to all the services they need to prevent placement, reunify after placement, and stabilize foster placements. These include mental health, substance abuse services, day care, housing, emergency cash, and other services. According to the Court Monitor, CFSA accomplished the requirement for third-quarter FY03, which was linking 50 percent of families to all appropriate services. By the end of the first quarter of FY05, that requirement jumps to 75 percent.
- **Placement more than 100 miles outside the District:** The requirement for third-quarter FY03 was no more than 60 children placed more than 100 miles outside the District, which CFSA substantially achieved. But by the end of third-quarter FY05, this number must drop sharply to no more than 35 children. Because children placed in distant Residential Treatment Facilities have the most intensive needs, meeting this requirement will mean substantial increases in local mental health and other community services.
- **Adoptions:** With 51 percent, CFSA barely met the fourth quarter FY03 requirement of having 50 percent of adoptable children in pre-adoptive placement within nine months of their goal becoming adoption. That requirement climbs to 75 percent by the end of the first quarter of FY05. Another requirement intended to speed adoptions is that children with a goal of adoption will have legal action initiated to free them for adoption within 30 days of their goal becoming adoption. The increase in requirements here is even more

rapid, illustrating its importance to the Federal Court: from 50 percent in December 2003 to 75 percent just nine months later in June 2004 and “full compliance” by the end of first-quarter 2005. Achieving this will demand intensive work and sufficient staffing among both CFSA ongoing social workers and OCC attorneys and paralegals.

These are just a few of the dramatic increases in expectations as the District proceeds with child welfare reform. After two-and-a-half years of scrambling to establish a foundation, we must now work even faster to actually weave the local safety net for the sake of children and families as well as to meet the District’s goal of ending Court involvement on time. In FY04, we must strengthen our remaining weak spots and complete the foundation for consistent, high quality practice. In FY05, we must leap ahead in performance across every aspect of child welfare and ensure that all essential services are in place to meet the real, underlying needs of families. In FY06, the last full year of the Implementation Plan, we must complete performance improvements and demonstrate to the Court that the District’s strategies for self-assessment and continuous improvement are strong enough to sustain high levels of performance into the future.

I am grateful for the steady commitment and support of the Council throughout this extraordinary passage. At the Mayor’s press conference last week where he commented on the Court Monitor’s reports, the Monitor said that once, she would have identified the District as among the worst of state child welfare systems, Today, she sees the District as comparable to other states. To have built the foundations of a public child welfare system in just two and a half **years** when other states have had twice that number of **decades**, is a credit to the commitment of the Mayor, the Council, and the Family Court, as well as to hard-working staff at CFSA and

community partners across the District. But of course, this is not enough: our goal is to be among the leaders, because we owe that much to all the District's children.